



# Focus

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## Motor Vehicle Emission Check Program

### On-Board Diagnostics

Have you ever waited in line to emission test your vehicle and wondered why modern technology hasn't produced a better motor vehicle testing system? Now, when you take your car to the test station, you may be able to reap the benefits of a new, more efficient test made possible by computer technology. As of July 2002, most 1996 and newer gasoline cars and light-duty trucks that get an emission check will be tested using this computer technology, called "on-board diagnostics" or OBD II, rather than a tailpipe test.

#### **What is an on-board diagnostic (OBD II) system?**

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OBD systems are computerized systems that monitor the mechanisms making up motor vehicle emission systems and key engine components. OBD systems can detect problems with emission control equipment that, if not repaired, will result in more pollution coming from your vehicle. When the system detects such a problem, it turns on a dashboard warning light to alert the driver that the vehicle should be checked by a repair technician – much like the way the oil light appears when a vehicle is low on oil.

#### **Which vehicles get the OBD II test?**

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Gasoline-powered cars and light trucks (gross vehicle weight rating of up to 8,500 pounds) that are 1996 and newer will be OBD II tested. Older vehicles don't have the same computer systems, so this kind of test won't work for them.

The lane operator will only test those vehicles with easily accessible OBD II systems. Vehicles with hard-to-access systems will be given a tailpipe test.

#### **How is the OBD II test done?**

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When you take your vehicle to the emission test station, the lane operator will plug in a cable to the vehicle's computer to download emission-related information. This does not affect the vehicle other than to read emission system information.

#### **Why is this test being required now?**

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The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has recognized that the OBD II test is a better tool for identifying polluting vehicles. The OBD II test is quicker and more effective than a tailpipe test, and provides more specific information about what needs to be repaired. Another advantage is that it can quickly eliminate clean vehicles from needing further action.

## **Who can fix OBD II-related problems?**

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Only qualified, trained technicians with the appropriate diagnostic and repair equipment should conduct OBD II-related service. Most repair businesses have the technology and qualified personnel to service 1996 and newer vehicles. If your vehicle fails its emission test, you will be given a list of Department of Ecology-authorized repair shops. These shops are required to have the ability to check the on-board diagnostic systems of 1996 and newer vehicles.

## **Are OBD II-related repairs covered under warranty?**

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Federal law requires that emission control systems be warranted for a minimum of two years or 24,000 miles. Warranty coverage for the on-board computer and catalytic converter *only* extends to eight years or 80,000 miles.

Many automakers provide extended warranty coverage beyond that required by law. Check your vehicle's warranty documents for more information.

## **For more information**

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For more information on the Emission Check Program or OBD II testing, please contact:

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